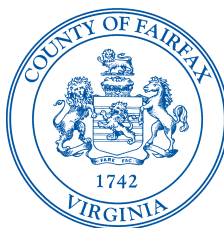


Understanding and Guiding Children as They Grow and Develop

Fairfax County Department of Family Services
Children, Youth and Families Division

KEEPING KIDS SAFE...

The Blue Ribbon Campaign



A publication of Fairfax County, Virginia

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Understanding and Guiding Children



This guide was developed by a team of parents, educators, social workers and other child development professionals. It presents information to help you better understand the typical behaviors of children as they move through different stages of development and recommends positive, effective ways to guide children as they grow.

Every child, every parent, and every family is unique. The relationship we form with our children is as special as they are. Raising a child brings great joy – and also, at certain times – moments of great challenge.

As we learn to be parents, we rely on many sources of wisdom and guidance, including our own family, culture and religious traditions. For every parent, however, there comes a moment – it may be during your child's first days or weeks of life or much later, during

the emerging independence of the teenage years – when your child presents a challenge that you're not sure how to handle.

This booklet provides information and resources to help parents build strong relationships with their children at any age. Those special relationships form the foundation for parents' efforts to support the healthy development of their children.

The Fairfax County Blue Ribbon Campaign dedicates *Understanding and Guiding Children as They Grow and Develop* to parents and other adults whose daily actions and decisions shape the lives and futures of children – and to the children, who are our community's hope and future.



Babies: Birth through 18 months



All babies are different. They enter the world with their own special personalities. Newborns know the difference between their parents and strangers. They seek and need to hear the voice and feel the gentle touch of their parent. Babies communicate their needs through crying – it is their language. When babies cry, they need something right away (for example: food, diaper change, hug/cuddle, nap).

Babies make strong connections with the people who care for them. This relationship is important to their healthy growth and development. Your baby learns, through your care, that the world is a safe place. As babies grow, they begin to learn to use words to communicate their needs, and they become more mobile – sitting up, rolling, crawling and walking.

What parents can do:

- **Learn how to give your baby a head start during pregnancy.** Parenting starts with good health care before the birth of the baby. To ensure the healthy development of your baby, it is important to get medical care as early in your pregnancy as possible, at least within the first three months.
- **Get to know your baby.** Some babies are fussy all the time, while others fuss only at certain times of the day. Some babies cry a lot, and others seem to smile all day. All of these personalities are normal, and all babies need their parents to understand their special needs. You will learn quickly whether your baby needs feeding, bathing, dressing, diapering, or hugging for comfort. Remember – what your baby needs most to be happy and healthy is your loving attention.
- **Hold and comfort your baby when she cries.** When crying babies are tended to quickly, they cry less and learn to trust adults. **Babies cannot be spoiled.**
- **Talk to your baby. You are his first teacher.** Talk to your baby when feeding, diapering, bathing and playing with him. When you go to the store, tell your baby what you are doing – talk. This helps him feel secure and develop language skills. Help your baby learn by talking, singing and reading to him.
- **Play with your baby.** Babies learn about themselves and the people around them by tasting, touching, listening, hearing and smelling things. Keep small items out of your baby's reach to prevent choking. Provide your baby with safe things to touch and explore. Smile at your baby and she will smile back. Babies love to see their parents' smiles. Encourage your baby to explore while you are close by. She will want to see you to feel safe.
- **Place your baby on his back to sleep.** Infants under one year of age should be placed on their backs to sleep to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). To avoid chances of suffocation or SIDS, do not use pillows, blankets and bumper guards in the crib. Do not smoke or allow others to smoke near your baby. Check on your baby while he is sleeping. For more information, visit www.sids.org.
- **Ask for help when you feel frustrated.** Ask a family member, friend, teacher or doctor for ideas on how to calm your baby when he will not stop crying. **Never shake your baby as this may lead to brain damage or death.**



Toddlers: 18 months through 3 years



Toddlers are curious and like to explore. They like to walk, run and climb. Toddlers are growing and changing rapidly and sometimes don't think before they act. (They are still learning self-control.) Toddlers may drop things and sometimes break them because they are learning about cause and effect. They are learning to talk and express themselves. "No" is one of the easier words for toddlers to say.

Toddlers like to do things on their own and will often tell you, "I can do it myself!" But they are still very dependent and connected to their parents. Toddlers may become upset when you leave them with a caregiver. As toddlers learn about the world, they continue to need your attention and to know you can be trusted to provide comfort and care.

What parents can do:

- **Play with your child and show affection.** Your toddler needs and wants your time and attention. Read and play with your child. Hold and hug him. Love and affection help children feel happy and secure.
- **Talk to your child and share books.** Talking, reading and singing will help your child's language grow. Share the songs and stories that are important to you and your family. Your toddler may choose the same book over and over, but that is all right because young children learn through repetition.
- **Provide safe places for your child to explore and play in your home and outdoors.** Children learn through exploring their environment. Be there to assist when needed. Your toddler may crawl up the stairs but need help to get down them safely.
- **Provide regular routines with clear and consistent rules.** Through routines, toddlers find comfort in knowing what to expect and what is expected of them. Rules should be clear, but not too many.
- **Offer real choices and accept either one.** "Would you like milk or juice?" This helps your toddler feel a sense of control, while you are setting the limits. Let her choose what book she wants to read or which game to play. Your toddler will feel pride in making the choice.
- **Be patient with toilet learning.** Your toddler may stay dry for long periods of time. This can be an early sign that your child is ready for toilet learning. Recognize and encourage your toddler's efforts. Some children can control their toileting needs by age two; others may lack this control until age three or four. Keep realistic expectations and a sense of humor. Accidents are part of learning.
- **Help your toddler with tantrums.** Show that you understand how your toddler feels, but let him know that tantrums or angry outbursts will not give him what he wants. Try to ignore tantrums unless your child risks being hurt, hurting someone else, or destroying something.
- **Focus on "do's" instead of "don'ts."** When adults spend more time showing children what they *can* do, rather than what they *cannot* do, children are more successful. Rather than "No, don't touch that," try to interest your child in a different toy or activity: "You may use the crayons on the paper (not the walls)."
- **Model the behavior you want to see in your child.** Young children copy parents' behaviors. If you are patient, caring and kind, your child will learn to treat others as you do. When parents spank, hit, scream or call children hurtful names, children may feel that they are not loved and are likely to copy that behavior with others.

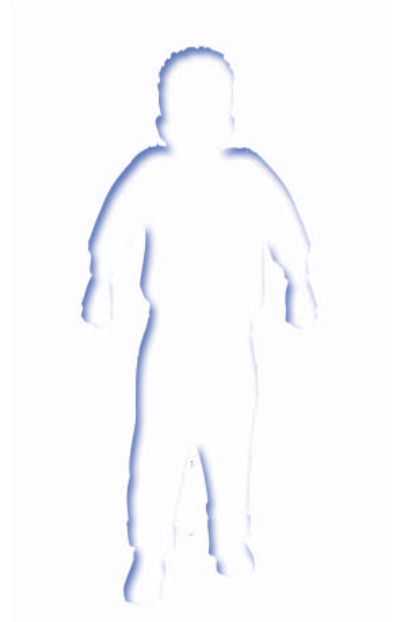
Preschool Age: 3 through 5 years



Preschoolers are energetic and active. They need lots of physical activity and may only be able to sit still for short periods of time. Preschoolers learn best through play. They enjoy being with friends. They often play near but not with other children. Preschoolers are independent and like to test limits set by adults. They like to talk and ask many questions. Preschoolers often need help from adults to find words to express their needs and feelings.

What parents can do:

- **Give your child the gift of time.** Young children want to be with their parents. Time with your child can occur in normal daily routines. Read with your child, share chores, cook, and always talk with your child. Share your language, stories and songs from your family. Your child is learning about who she is and what traditions are important to your family.
- **Get to know your child.** If you know that your child is irritable during the first hour of the day or when tired or hungry, try not to ask too much of him at that time. If he is suddenly afraid of something, show your understanding. This is common behavior for preschool-age children.
- **Set clear and consistent expectations.** When young children know what is expected of them, they will feel secure and better able to follow the rules set for them.
- **Give your child simple, clear directions.** Your child may not understand if you use too many words, or have too many steps in your directions. Simply tell your child what you need. For example, "Take your toy off the stairs. Someone may fall."
- **Give your child real choices.** Like toddlers, preschoolers need to feel a sense of control. They also need clear limits. For example, "Would you like to wear your blue shirt or your green shirt today?"
- **Provide your child with words for strong emotions.** This helps your child learn how to recognize the effects of her own emotions and to understand the feelings of others. Share stories about feelings and say, "Look at his face. Can you see he is angry?" Show your child you understand her feelings: "It looks like you are sad."
- **Stop aggressive behaviors you don't like.** Ask yourself, "What might have happened before the behavior occurred?" Consider that your child may be overtired or hungry. Suggest and help start a new activity or guide your child to a place where he can release aggressive feelings without hurting himself or others. For example, you can say, "If you feel like hitting, hit your pillow, but you can't hit me."
- **Model the behavior you want to see in your child.** If your child hears kind words, she is likely to repeat them. If she sees affection, she is likely to show affection. If arguing or hitting are common in your home, your child may copy that behavior.



Young School Age: 5 through 8 years



This is a time when children really like to talk, and they have lots to share. They are energetic and active. Young school-aged children place great importance on rules. They may give their attention to things that interest them, but they have short attention spans for verbal directions from adults. They enjoy learning and trying new things. Caring for and sharing with others begins to develop at this age. Friendships with children of the same gender become important.

What parents can do:

- **Spend time with your child.** Talk, share songs, stories and activities as a family. This helps your child better understand your beliefs, traditions and expectations. It will contribute to her sense of identity.
- **Be patient and give reminders often.** Children may often forget what they have been told, and it may take them several tries to do something correctly. Try providing instructions in small steps, rather than asking your child to do several things at one time. For example, “Remember to wash your hands after using the bathroom.”
- **Provide your child with clear rules and reasonable consequences.** This will help your child feel secure and responsible for his actions. For example, “Remember our rule is for you to stay in the yard when playing outside. Because you left the yard, you must now come inside.”
- **Set limits for your child.** Make decisions about the use of TV, music, videos, video games, the Internet and other activities. Many TV shows and video games have violent or adult themes. Children may model the behaviors they see on TV.
- **Let your child know you understand how she feels.** This shows your child that her feelings are real and important. “I understand that you are angry at your sister because she would not play with you.”
- **Recognize your child’s positive behavior with encouraging words.** This will help your child feel good about himself and will also encourage these behaviors in the future. “I saw you put away your toys. Good for you! Now you have room to dance!”
- **Help your child learn how to solve problems.** This is an important skill your child needs at school, when playing with friends, and in dealing with difficult situations. For example: “Your brother is using the computer. What can you do while waiting for your turn?”
- **Model the behavior you want to see in your child.** Children learn from your behavior. If you do not want your children to use language you do not like, you should not use that language. If you want your children to use kind words, you should use them. If you want your children to read, let them see you read.



Middle School Age: 8 through 13 years



Pre-adolescents are going through many changes physically and emotionally. They may become self-conscious about the changes in their bodies. They are trying to figure out who they are, what they do well, and how they fit in with friends and family. Pre-adolescents begin to take responsibility for their behavior. They have a strong sense of fairness. Friendships and peer interactions become very important to them. They often worry about how others are judging them. Teasing and bullying may occur at this age.

What parents can do:

- **Talk with your child.** Open and honest communication will make it easier for your child to share problems and ask for your advice now and later.
- **Listen to your child.** Listening helps you become more aware of your child's different moods and feelings. Show your respect for your child's feelings, thoughts, and ideas. Avoid interrupting and giving your opinion until you have all the facts.
- **Give your child increasing responsibilities.** This helps your child build independence and self-confidence. It shows your trust in your child's abilities and choices. Make sure the responsibility matches your child's age and level of maturity.
- **Reassure your child.** Find something positive to say about your child every day. It is important for children to do things they enjoy and to try new things. Teach your child that making mistakes and failing are also part of learning and growing.
- **Provide boundaries and guidelines.** Pre-adolescents need clear and consistent boundaries and guidelines to feel safe and secure. Set boundaries and rules together with your child. Children are more likely to follow rules if they are involved in setting them, and if the rules "make sense." Talk about expectations and decide together on reasonable consequences. For example, you and your child can agree that she must complete her homework before she can get together with friends.
- **Help your child effectively handle teasing and bullying.** Teach your child not to tease or bully other children. Tell him to ask for help from a trusted adult if he is teased or bullied. Get involved. Share your concerns with your child's teacher. Get your child involved in activities that help develop friendships.
- **Share your values and family traditions with your child.** This helps your child better understand your beliefs and expectations. It will contribute to a positive sense of identity and strengthen family connections.
- **Model the behavior you want to see in your child.** Children copy what they see and are taught. Be the kind of person you want your child to be. Teach your child to respect other people's feelings and beliefs by demonstrating your respect for your child and for others.

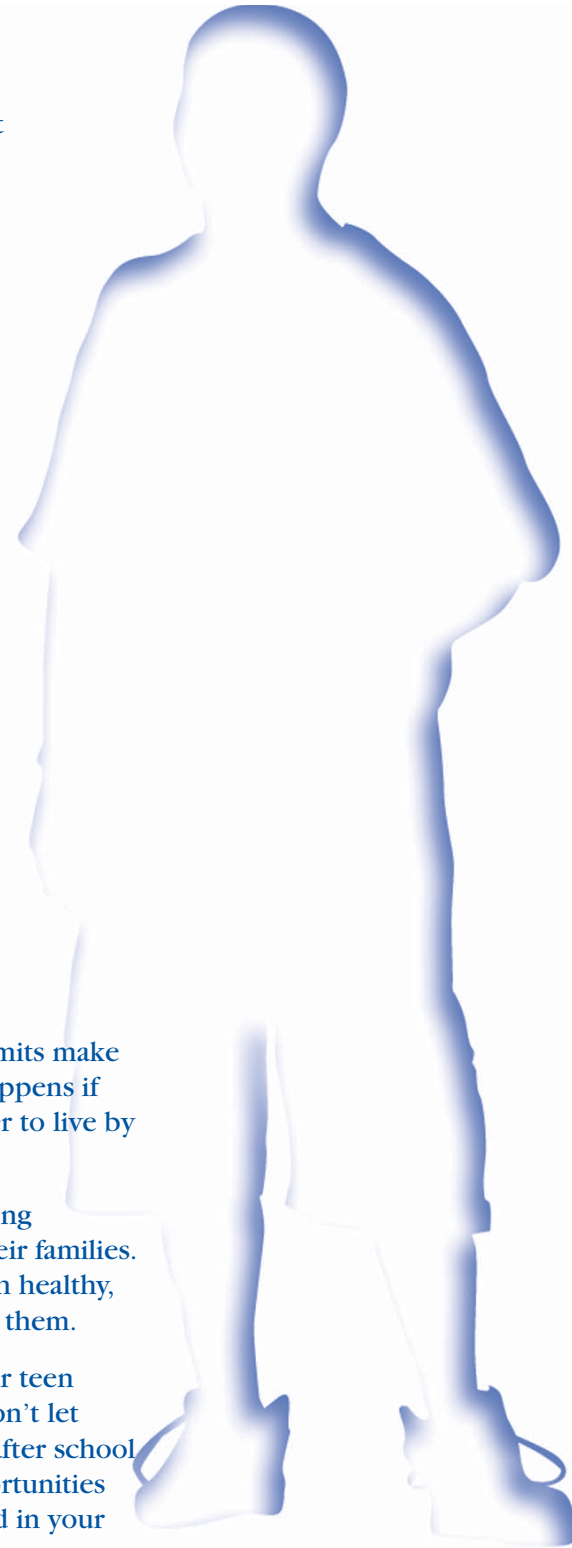
Teenagers: 13 through 18 years



Teenagers have a clear understanding of rules and consequences. They are willing to take on more responsibility. Self-identity and independence are important and often lead to conflicts with parents about values and beliefs. Teenagers have a strong peer culture and are concerned about being accepted by their peers. Interest in romantic relationships may develop. Peer pressure is high and can shape a teenager's behavior, but **parents remain the most important influence in a teenager's life**. Even if they say they do not, teenagers continue to need and want attention and interactions with their parents.

What parents can do:

- **Talk with your teen.** Parents may feel their teen doesn't listen to them, but teens still look to their parents for guidance. Be ready to listen when they want to talk about what is important to them. Share your views on dating, drug and alcohol use, and smoking.
- **Notice the positive things your teen does and use encouraging words.** For example, you might say, "You can be proud of the way you handled that situation this morning."
- **Spend time with your teen.** Positive activities with caring adults give teens a clear direction and help them build strong connections with family, school and community.
 - Cook and eat together as a family. Include traditional family dishes. Meal times provide a great opportunity to talk about the day's events.
 - Exercise or play sports as a family.
 - Attend school activities and community events.
 - Volunteer with your teen in your community.
- **Set rules and be consistent.** Even though teens will not admit it, rules or limits make them feel safe and loved. Develop rules together as a family and discuss what happens if they are broken. Talk about why the rules should be followed and work together to live by them.
- **Get to know your teen's friends and their families.** Friends have a strong influence at this age, so it is important to get to know your teen's friends and their families. Much peer pressure is actually positive. Encourage your teen to spend time with healthy, positive friends. Welcome the friends to your home and spend time talking with them.
- **Know where your teen is and what she is doing.** Set clear rules for your teen about what she may do and with whom she may spend time. Set curfews and don't let your teen attend parties if adults will not be present. Know where your teen is after school and on the weekends. These are times when unsupervised teens may have opportunities to use drugs, commit crimes and engage in other risky behavior. Staying involved in your teen's life shows you care.
- **Model the behavior you want to see in your teen.** Be the kind of person you want your teen to be. Talk to him about what you believe and what you expect of him. Show the caring, honesty, discipline and openness you want your teen to have. If you smoke or abuse alcohol, know that your teen is watching. Model nonviolent behavior. Teens learn from your example.



Parent Resources



When it comes to parenting, there are few absolutes, except that every child needs to be loved. There is no one “right way.” New challenges can appear daily as your children grow. Additional information and support can help you with day-to-day challenges. More difficult challenges, such as unemployment or parenting a child with special needs, can add to family tension. Different parenting techniques work for different children under different circumstances. Do not expect to be perfect – information and support are available for you.

The Blue Ribbon Campaign is a local coalition of individuals and organizations – community, civic, school, business, faith-based and government – dedicated to keeping kids safe. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs and click on the blue ribbon for more information and to view all of the available Blue Ribbon Campaign publications.

Check out the community resources available in your community:

- **Public Libraries.** Books, Internet access, books on tape, special activities for children and families. Find the library branch nearest you at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/living/libraries, 703-324-3100, TTY 703-324-8365.
- **Sports and recreation opportunities.** (Park Authority) Nine RECenters with the metro area’s top aquatics facilities. All RECenters have classes and camps for children. Some have preschool programs. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks, 703-324-8700, TTY 703-803-3354.
- **Teen programs** (Department of Community and Recreation Services). www.fairfaxcounty.gov/REC/, 703-324-8336, TTY 703-222-9693 or Virginia Relay 711.
- **Community services to help with family needs.** If your family is in difficult circumstances, Fairfax County’s Department of Systems Management for Human Services, Coordinated Services Planning, may be able to help you find food, clothing, housing, transportation, health care other resources. Call 703-222-0880, Spanish 703-631-3366, TTY 703-222-9452.

Parenting

- **Take a parenting class.** Parenting classes can give you the skills you need to raise a happy, healthy child. Find classes through Fairfax County Public Schools’ Family Services and Involvement Section at www.fcps.edu/DIS/OECFS/FLI, 703-227-2626, or in the Department of Family Services’ Parenting Resource Guide, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/ParentingResource.
- **Child Supervision Guidelines.** Children 7 years old and younger should not be left alone for any period of time. For more details about Fairfax County’s Child Supervision Guidelines, visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/childrenyouth/homealone.htm, or call the Child Protective Services telephone hotline/helpline at 703-324-7400, TTY 703-222-9452. Information is available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean and Farsi at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/childrenyouth/blue_ribbon_campaign.htm.
- **Call a helpline.** Fairfax County’s Child Protective Services hotline offers assistance to parents who need help. Call 703-324-7400, TTY 703-222-9452. Two organizations offer 24-hour helplines for parents who need help or parenting advice: ChildHelp USA®, 1-800-4-A-CHILD(224453); and Prevent Child Abuse Virginia, 1-800-CHILDREN(245-3736).
- **Find resources for keeping children and adolescents mentally healthy and drug free.** Information is available from the United States Department of Health and Human Services at www.family.samhsa.gov.
- **Learn about child development.** Talk to your doctor, teacher or child care professional if you have questions. Two organizations that have information available for parents are: Zero to Three®, www.zerotothree.org; and the National Association for Education of Young Children, www.naeyc.org.

Child Care

- **Resources about finding and paying for child care and how to become a child care provider.** Fairfax County Office for Children, 703-324-8100 for services in English and Spanish, www.fairfaxcountny.gov/childcare.

More Parent Resources



- **The School Age Child Care Program** offers before and after school child care for children attending kindergarten through 6th grade. SACC centers are located in most Fairfax County public elementary schools, as well as in the Key and Kilmer Centers which serve children and youth with disabilities, ages 5 - 21. SACC offers four programs: School Year, Winter, Spring and Summer Camp. SACC fees are based on gross household income on a sliding fee scale. Contact SACC registration at 703-449-8989, TTY 711, or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare/sacc.htm for more information.

Internet Safety

- **Computer resources and assistance.** Office of Partnerships, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/partnerships/clcp.htm, 703-324-5171, TTY 703-222-9198.
- **Internet safety information.** www.netsmartz.org; www.getnetwise.org; www.childsafenet.org

Counseling

- **Talk to someone.** Tell a trusted family member, friend, health care provider or a leader in your faith community if you need help. Consider joining a support group for parents through SCAN of Northern Virginia at 703-820-9001, www.scanva.org.
- **Seek counseling.** Individual, couple or family counseling can identify and reinforce healthy ways to communicate and parent. Call the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board - Mental Health Services at 703-481-4230, Spanish 703-799-2838, TTY 703-481-4110, or the Center for Multicultural Human Services at 703-533-3302, ext. 303, www.cmhs.org.

Special Needs

- **Resources for infants and toddlers with special needs.** Information, resources and services are available through the Infant and Toddler Connection at the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/csb/ITC/itcmain.htm, 703-246-7121, TTY 703-324-4495.
- **Resources for children and adolescents with special needs.** Fairfax County Public Schools' Child Find has resources for children ages 20 months to 5 years at www.fcps.edu/ss/preschool/childfd1.htm, 571-423-4105. The FCPS Parent Resource Center also provides information for parents about children with special needs at www.fcps.edu/ss/prchomep.htm, 703-204-3941.
- **Sports and recreation programs for children and youth with special needs.** Department of Community and Recreation Services - Therapeutic Recreation Services, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/rec/, 703-324-5532, TTY 703-222-9693, or Virginia Relay 711.
- **Clemyjontri Park** is located at 6317 Georgetown Park in McLean. The park features a playground designed to provide full accessibility, a carousel and a picnic pavilion. Call 703-388-2807 or go online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/clemyjontri/.
- **The School Age Child Care Program** serves children with special needs at all SACC centers. In addition, the Key and Kilmer Centers offer programs for children and youth with disabilities, ages 5 - 21. SACC offers four programs: School Year, Winter, Spring and Summer Camp. SACC fees are based on gross household income on a sliding fee scale. Contact SACC registration at 703-449-8989, TTY 711, or visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/childcare/sacc.htm for more information.
- **PEATC (Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center).** Contact for assistance in finding educational, health care and social services for children with disabilities. Resources, information and supports are available for parents and professionals at www.peatc.org, 703-923-0010.

We hope you have found this guide to be helpful. If you have suggestions for additional information and ideas to be included in future editions, please call the Fairfax County Department of Family Services at 703-324-7720; TTY 703-222-9452. We would like to hear from you.